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*Note:
What follows examines the beliefs and
teachings of Jesus and Muhammad;
peace and blessings be upon them both.*

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'Why?'

*BEFORE EACH chapter,
there is a brief passage like this that tells you
a little bit about my journey to Islam.*

*I came to Islam after three decades of restless
dissatisfaction with conventional Christianity.
Although I've read a lot of conversion stories
since I embraced Islam in March of 2003,
I haven't found many that cited the Gospels
as a point of entry to the Holy Qur'an.
That is how it was for me.*

*If you are a Christian reading this book,
please know that what follows is not meant
disrespectfully, but is offered only in the
service of a deep, shared love of the Messiah.*

THE DEEPEST AND BITTEREST curse of ancient China, supposedly, was 'May you live in interesting times.'

Those of us who have lived as Christians in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have, for reasons that may mystify us, found ourselves living in very interesting times indeed. In recent years, uneasiness about Islam has been increasingly impossible to ignore in the United States, Europe, and Australia.

In particular, one hears a great deal today about a 'war,' 'conflict,' or 'clash' between Islam and Christianity. The topic is so prominent in the media that many people assume that there is something irreconcilable between these two approaches to God. It is not surprising, then, that so many Christians of good will have concluded that Islam and Christianity are fundamentally incompatible.

Yet, if, by 'Christianity', we mean 'that which Jesus Christ meant to convey to his hearers', I believe

that these people of good will may well be mistaken when they tell us that Islam is incompatible with Christianity.

What's more, I believe we can now make the case that the historically oldest Gospel verses reflecting the reported sayings of Jesus are entirely compatible with Islam.



This is a book for Christians, and about Islam. These days, anyone who writes such a book should expect to face a *skeptical* audience, and that is just as well. Skepticism about important matters is healthy.

What's more, the author of a book like this one should probably expect only *thoughtful* Christians to accompany him to the end of the page, or, God willing, beyond. Only thoughtful people are willing to examine their own religious assumptions closely.

The thoughtful, skeptical Christian, then, is the audience for this book. That you have read even this far suggests that you are a thoughtful Christian. So please complete the equation and be as skeptical as you possibly can as you make your way through these pages.



What, specifically, is there to be skeptical about?

We can start with the title. The book is called *Beyond Mere Christianity* for two reasons. First, in

response to C.S. Lewis' influential 1952 work, *Mere Christianity*, which stands as a masterpiece of Christian apologetics and perpetuates many longstanding misconceptions about Jesus.

The second reason, perhaps less obvious, is that a case can be made, based on current, responsible Gospel scholarship, that Jesus was calling his people to the Salvation that lies *beyond* the worship of the merely created, the Salvation that relies instead on the direct worship of the Creator.

I believe emphatically that the authentic words of Jesus invite us to move beyond what is conventionally understood as Christianity for this Salvation ... and enter with no delay the 'house' of Islam. Which room we choose to occupy once we're inside, of course, is up to us.

If you're a Christian, and you find that you are skeptical about these points, then we're ready to move on.



The word 'Islam' means, simultaneously, 'submission' and 'peace'. This faith demands in no uncertain terms that its adherents reject anything and everything that conflicts with obedience to God. It does not mandate blind obedience to any human authority.

I believe that someone who scrupulously follows this religion's command of submission to God Alone is in fact adhering completely to the authentic teachings of Jesus, at least to the degree that they are reflected in

the surviving Gospels. I also believe this religion is precisely the same one he preached and practiced.

Holding and expressing this view has led me into any number of interesting life experiences, many of which involved heated discussions with Christians who believed a) that I had no right to describe myself any longer as a follower of Jesus, and b) that Islam and Christianity have far more separating them than they have in common. This book challenges thoughtful Christians to consider the discussions that follow before coming to a final conclusion on a) and b), above.



If you are a Christian, the idea that Jesus practiced the same faith that today's news broadcasts hold responsible for so many of the world's problems probably seems far-fetched to you.

It certainly seemed far-fetched to me when I first encountered it. Yet many contemporary Christians have reached life-changing personal conclusions about the Gospel message and its relation to Islam. A prominent American sheikh, Yusuf Estes, is an obvious example, and there are many others.

The American television news magazines usually don't share the stories of these converts to Islam with the world at large, and their motivations sometimes seem mysterious to non-Muslims who encounter them. From personal experience, though, I strongly suspect that most of these people found themselves, at the end of the day, deeply concerned about the consequences

of calling Jesus 'Lord' without obeying his instructions —found themselves far more concerned about that command, in fact, than about any media coverage of geopolitical issues.

So we changed our lives.



People like us do indeed exist in North America, Europe, and Australia. There are more of us than you may imagine. This book is here to give you a clear answer to the question we hear over and over again: 'Why?'

Why would a Christian believer choose to embrace this faith, over all the other possible faith choices? Why pursue the one system of worship that most of today's commentators agree is 'at odds with Christianity'? Why leave the familiar congregations of friends, relatives, and members of the clergy—congregations whose concern and support sustained us for so long, and who would rejoice if we were only to renounce Islam and return to the way of life of which they approve?

The pages that follow, aim to answer these questions.



Two flawed understandings of Islam can present a major challenge for anyone trying to come to terms with it. First and foremost is the notion that it is an anti-Christian faith. It is not. Christians often express

profound surprise at Islam's extraordinary reverence for Jesus, and for the special status that Christians enjoy under traditional Islamic law.

The second misconception is the common notion that Islam is rooted in violence. Outsiders studying the actual teachings of the faith are usually caught unawares by its ceaseless promotion of mercy and forgiveness over violence and revenge.

Even if political upheavals, irresponsible media coverage, and the lunacy of religious extremists have sometimes combined to obscure these two core truths of Islam—as a cloud may seem, for a time, to blot out the sun—they remain core truths nevertheless. I hope my work here does these truths justice, but if it does not, the responsibility lies not with Islam, but with me.

I WAS born in Los Angeles, California, in 1961.

My parents did not practice Christianity, but other relatives and friends did, and the teachings of Jesus Christ emerged early in my life as the 'true north' of my spiritual journey.

I was drawn to the Gospels at a young age—eleven—and I read them compulsively.

I still have the red King James Bible I bought as a child; my own handwritten note on the front page proclaims June 26, 1974, as the date I accepted Jesus as my personal savior.